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**QUEEN 'SNAKEHEAD' SISTER PING IS EXTRADITED FROM HONG KONG TO
NEW YORK TO FACE ALIEN SMUGGLING AND HOSTAGE TAKING CHARGES**

JAMES B. COMEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, MARTIN D. FICKE, the Interim Special Agent in Charge, New York, of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("BICE") of the United States Department of Homeland Security, and KEVIN P. DONOVAN, the Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's New York Field Office, announced that CHENG CHUI PING, also known as "SISTER PING," who is alleged to have been the "snakehead" or leader of an extensive international alien smuggling operation, arrived in New York this morning to face criminal charges after having been extradited from Hong Kong.

SISTER PING vigorously contested extradition in Hong Kong from the time of her arrest until her appeals were exhausted before Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeals in June 2003. SISTER PING's arrest in April 2000 at the Hong Kong International Airport followed an extensive five-year worldwide manhunt and

resulted from an investigation conducted by the New York offices of the FBI and the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("BICE") of the United States Department of Homeland Security.

SISTER PING is named in a seven-count Superseding Indictment (the "Indictment"), which charges her with conspiracy to smuggle aliens into the United States, hostage taking, money laundering and trafficking in ransom proceeds, among other charges. Two of the charges - a hostage taking count and an illegal money remitting count - were determined by Hong Kong authorities not to be extraditable.

According to the Government's extradition request, beginning as far back as 1984, PING oversaw the operation of an international alien smuggling ring, which smuggled into the United States hundreds, and likely thousands, of aliens who came principally from the Fujien Province of the People's Republic of China ("PRC"). The aliens typically were smuggled aboard sea-going vessels and, upon their arrival in the United States, were held hostage until their smuggling debts to SISTER PING, generally about \$30,000, were satisfied.

The Boston Transport

According to the Indictments, Complaint and extradition request, in September 1992 SISTER PING directed the smuggling of approximately 130 aliens from the Fujien Province of the PRC aboard a Taiwanese fishing boat that arrived off the coast of Boston, Massachusetts. After the aliens made it to the United States, SISTER PING arranged for the aliens to be taken hostage

until their smuggling fees were paid. To accomplish this operation, SISTER PING paid members of the Fuk Ching Gang - a notoriously powerful and violent Chinatown gang of approximately 30 young men - \$750,000 to retrieve the aliens by boat off the coast of Massachusetts and to transport them to a safehouse in Brooklyn, New York. While transferring the aliens from SISTER PING's smuggling vessel to the gang's boat at sea, one of the gang members fired a handgun into the air to force the aliens to proceed in an orderly fashion. The gang member also threatened to kill the aliens unless they complied with his orders to hide in the hull of the boat. After the aliens were driven to New York by members of the gang in three U-Haul trucks, the aliens were collected at the Yoan Wah warehouse in Brooklyn by SISTER PING's men. Those who could not meet their debt were taken to an apartment, believed to be in New York's Chinatown, where they were held hostage by members of the Fuk Ching Gang until their smuggling fees were paid to SISTER PING.

The 'Golden Venture' Transport

Also, according to court papers, SISTER PING and other snakeheads collaborated on an operation that ultimately involved the smuggling by boat of approximately 300 citizens from the PRC into the United States aboard the ship the "Golden Venture." In the summer of 1992, a large group of aliens - including about 20

or so "customers" of SISTER PING - boarded a cruise ship called the "Najid II" in Thailand and traveled to Kenya, Africa. Because the captain of the Najid II refused to take the aliens any farther, the aliens remained in Africa until a second boat, the Golden Venture - which was en route from Thailand with other aliens - came to collect them in the spring of 1993. On June 6, 1993, the Golden Venture, which was carrying approximately 300 aliens, including SISTER PING's customers, ran aground off the Rockaways in Queens, New York. Several aliens drowned in the ocean in their attempts to swim ashore.

Money Laundering and Trafficking in Ransom Proceeds

The extradition request also describes SISTER PING's use of a money transmitting business located at 47 East Broadway in Manhattan's Chinatown (the "Money Transmitting Business") to facilitate her and other snakeheads' smuggling operations.

For example, in March 1991, another snakehead delivered approximately \$30,900 to SISTER PING at her Money Transmitting Business, and told SISTER PING that he was traveling to Bangkok where he wanted the money to be sent to him (the extra \$900 allegedly was SISTER PING'S money transfer fee - \$300 for every \$10,000 transferred).

After the snakehead arrived in Bangkok, he received a telephone call telling him that the \$30,000 he had left with

SISTER PING in New York was waiting for him at an underground bank in Bangkok. The snakehead then used the \$30,000 to finance a scheme to smuggle by airplane four aliens from the PRC to New York, where they were held hostage until their relatives paid their smuggling fee.

SISTER PING also used her Money Transmitting Business to transfer smuggling fees collected at a store she owned in the PRC to her business in New York in connection with a March 1994 smuggling operation in which approximately 105 aliens were smuggled from the PRC to the shore of Cape May, New Jersey, and then taken to various safehouses where they were again held hostage until their relatives in the PRC paid their smuggling fees.

SISTER PING was arraigned today before Chief United States District Judge MICHAEL B. MUKASEY of Southern District of New York and was remanded to jail pending a future bail hearing.

If convicted, PING faces a maximum sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Mr. COMEY praised the BICE, the FBI/NYPD Joint Asian Organized Crime Task Force and the Hong Kong Police Department for their conduct of this investigation and their work leading to PING's arrest and extradition.

Assistant United States Attorneys MICHAEL G. MCGOVERN
and DAVID P. BURNS are in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the Indictment are merely
accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and
until proven guilty.

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